'Mirrorgate': A Press Empire Strikes Back

■ **Scandal:** Seymour Hersh has been accused of libel because of a book linking British journalists with Israel's secret service.

By WILLIAM TUOHY
TIMES STAFF WRITER

LONDON—The Maxwell Empire struck back Thursday in a nasty spat between the British publishing mogul and a noted American journalist, a battle that some already have dubbed "Mirrorgate."

On his arrival in London, Seymour Hersh, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter, was served with libel writs in connection with assertions he makes in his new book that Robert Maxwell, publisher of Mirror Group Newspapers, and Nicholas Davies, foreign editor of the London Daily Mirror, had links with Israel's secret service.

"What I have written is true, and I stand by it," Hersh, author of "The Samson Option," said at a news conference where he was handed the libel writs by a lawyer acting for Maxwell, who is also publisher of the New York Daily News.

"I am prepared to defend it in any place I have to," Hersh said of his latest work, which asserts that Maxwell and Davies had close ties to Mossad, the Israeli secret intelligence service, and that Davies had spied for Israel and illegally sold arms to Iran.

Hersh's claims have received widespread circulation in Britain, where they were even raised in Parliament by two members of Parliament on Wednesday.

Los Angeles Times

'What I have written is true, and I stand by it,' says Seymour Hersh, sued for libel in England.

Hersh's book—which also reports that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir had passed top-secret American intelligence, stolen by convicted spy Jonathan Pollard, to the Soviet Union—hit London bookstores Monday.

Its assertions about Maxwell and Davies were denounced by both men, prompting Hersh to declare that he would fly to London, as he did Thursday, to present his evidence.

"I can assure you that I understand the British libel laws and the inherent problems," he said earlier, referring to Britain's libel statutes, which are much tougher than their U.S. counterparts. "Nobody went into this lightly. I have a body of evidence to support what is said."

Asked on BBC radio if he had connections with Mossad, Maxwell, who also owns a major paper in Tel Aviv, declared: "Certainly not. It is outrageous that you should use this. It is a ridiculous statement. The allegation is made under the privilege of the House, with no shred of evidence about it."

Davies, 52, who has been covering the Commonwealth Conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, condemned the charges as a "complete and total lie."

But Davies' former wife, Janet Fielding, a 33-year-old actress, has told London newspapers that she gave Hersh two documents she found in the couple's former home when she went to collect her belongings during a bitter separation. They appeared to be letters from U.S. arms dealers to Davies indicating that they were involved in weapons deals with him. Davies, however, branded them as fakes and declared that he had been set up.

On Wednesday, the Hersh allegations were picked up by Conservative member of Parliament Rupert Allason, who writes books on intelligence under the name Nigel West, and by Labor member George Galloway, who claimed that Davies betrayed Israeli nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu to the Mossad in London.

In 1986, Vanunu made sensational revelations to the London Sunday Times about Israel's nuclear program, based at Dimona in the Negev Desert, where he worked for several years. He backed up his statements about the size of the Israeli nuclear arsenal with photographs he had taken, providing the first hard evidence about the extent of Israel's atomic arms program.

According to Hersh, Davies helped Mossad agents in London discover the hiding place of Vanunu, who was under wraps until the story was printed, enabling them to set up Vanunu with a woman who was a Mossad agent, who persuaded him to join her in Rome for a vacation.

There, Vanunu has told his family, he was drugged and returned to Israel by ship for trial. In secret proceedings, Vanunu was convicted of treason and given a long prison sentence. He is now in solitary confinement.

In his book, Hersh used as a major source a former Israeli intelligence agent, Ari Ben-Menashe, who told the author that he worked closely with Davies and who had made charges to Congress about the Iran-Contra affair.

Other sources have questioned Ben-Menashe's statements in the Iran-Contra operation. Davies said he had known Ben-Menashe as a news source and allowed him to use the Davieses' London home as a local mailing address.

On Wednesday, House of Commons Leader John MacGregor said that, if questions raised about export sales to Iran justified an investigation by the Department of Trade, he would recommend it.

The Daily Mirror has indicated the depth of Maxwell's feelings in a front-page editorial declaring of the two members of Parliament:

"They have as much honor as a pair of jackals scavenging in a rubbish heap, which is where they both belong. If either Mr. Allason or Mr. Galloway had the guts of a louse, an altogether higher form of life, they would stand outside the privileges and protection of Parliament and repeat those allegations where they can be sued."

BOOK REVIEW

A Literate Portrait of Family's Disintegration

By JUDITH FREEMAN
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

FORMS OF SHELTER
By Angela Davis-Gardner
Ticknor & Fields
$19.95, 276 pages

Angela Davis-Gardner's first novel is as fluid as a glassy stream in rural North Carolina where "Forms of Shelter" takes place.

The theme is familiar—a family's slow, painful disintegration into ruin—but rarely has an author confronted more honestly one of the deepest betrayals of the notion of family, the sexual abuse of a child by a trusted adult.

The book opens with a haunting image of a 5-year-old child named Beryl riding on her father's shoulders, crossing dew-laden fields in the early morning light, happy in the safety of her father's love as they head out together to feed her new pony, which she both fears and loves.

Later that day her father disappears, leaving only a note. He's gone to Chicago to become a jazz musician. It's the last time Beryl, her brother Stevie, or her mother Joanne will ever see the man, though his name and face will continue to haunt them.

How can a family dissolve so quickly? So irreversibly? Bewildered by the loss, Beryl attempts to construct an ordered world of cause and effect, believing that through her own feeble efforts at goodness she can will her father back.

Instead, she finds herself stuck for a number of years in the tense atmosphere of her grandparents' house, where her grandmother attempts to dispense kindness while Grandpa, a stuffy and religious man, drones on about God and sin.

Beryl, who narrates the tale, witnesses the progressive decline of her mother who tries to mend her life by going back to college. Instead, her frail, shattered mother succumbs to a depression so deep she cracks up and is hospitalized.

Enter Dr. Jack Fonteyn, classics instructor, translator of Ovid's "Metamorphosis," a smooth-talking, polished suitor who instantly begins to "transform" Beryl's mother:

"She'd been a sad sack, a shop girl, a bright but untutored mind. He'd gotten the hair off her neck into a sleek bun; bought her clothes that didn't look small-town; persuaded her that one Tolstoy was worth a thousand Edna Ferbers." Most importantly, he encourages Beryl's mother to think she can be a writer.

Whether out of gratitude, or desperation, Beryl's mother marries Jack and moves her children into his house, believing, as she tells Beryl repeatedly, that he has become the family's "savior."

From the very moment Beryl is introduced to her prospective stepfather, the reader knows something is wrong, and knows what it is. There's a strange, subtle sexual tension between the child and adult, a predatory and unpleasant attentiveness on the part of Jack, a flattered yet confused response from Beryl.

But Dr. Jack Fonteyn is so likable, so educated and intelligent, so sensitive to children, though he gazes a little too long at Beryl, letting his eyes travel over her Botticelli-like face and down her long, coltish legs.

In his country house, a modern-glass behemoth with a tennis court and beehives, a tenuous domesticity begins. Beryl's mother writes. Jack translates Ovid. And Stevie and Beryl are showered with gifts.

Although Beryl initially dislikes her new stepfather, she finds herself won over, particularly when he builds her a treehouse near the tennis court, from which she can spy on him tending his beehives.

It's a fitting metaphor that Jack is a beekeeper. In Beryl's telling of events, there isn't a moment—including the instances of Jack's honey-tongued sweetness—when you don't also feel his potential for havoc, just as you do when there's a bee buzzing near your face.

The sense of menace builds slowly throughout the book. In Jack's house, things begin to turn sour. Beryl watches her mother and stepfather whittle away at each other's sanity, and at the same time, enters puberty and discovers the minefield of sexual feelings awaiting her.

What's astonishing is that when the inevitable happens in a fierce, highly symbolic scene in the beekeeping shed, we're still surprised. We expect the ogre to be ruthless, venal, cunning. Jack is much worse, he is a freckled, leering rapscallion, a moral amnesiac, a rapacious, betraying Everyman.

"Forms of Shelter" doesn't take the easy way out. It concludes on a note of hard pain as the adult Beryl finally admits the truth to her brother Stevie after their mother's funeral. But that truth creates a new place inside of her that feels something like peace.

For anyone who has ever suffered the emotional savagery of childhood sexual abuse, the message is clear.

It is possible to survive it, to talk about it, to go on with courage. It's also possible to write about it and create, as Angela Davis-Gardner has done, a deeply moving piece of literature.

Next: *Carolyn See reviews "This Earth of Mankind" by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (William Morrow).*

IN BRIEF

Celebrity Haunt Will Benefit Deaf Theater

A "Hellacious Celebrity Haunt," with special-effects wizard Bob Short and Timber Wolf Productions creating the atmosphere, will raise funds to benefit Deaf West Theatre on Saturday. Marlee Matlin, Richard Dreyfuss, Susan Dey, Leonard Nimoy, Walter Matthau, James Earl Jones and other celebrities have been invited.

All proceeds will benefit the first nonprofit resident theater west of the Mississippi to produce plays in sign language. Tickets are $250. For information, call (213) 660-0877.

For the Record

Senior citizen discounts—A chart accompanying an Oct. 13 story on senior citizen discounts should have noted that not all Supercuts salons offer the discount.

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Bullock's Woman Event:
See the Fall Breckenridge collection informerly modeled at Bullock's Santa Ana on Saturday, October 26 from 1-4pm.
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